V. Collaborative Permanency Programs

A. Programs

- 5 Acres, The Boys' and Girls' Aid Society of Los Angeles County
- Destination Family Youth Project
- EMQ Children & Family Services Wraparound With Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services
- Enhanced Family Participation in Case Planning; Family Group Conferencing; Family Group Decision Making
- Team Decision Making
- You Gotta Believe Project
- Youth Involvement in Case Planning

5 Acres, The Boys' and Girls' Aid Society of Los Angeles County

What is it?

This is an innovative program that seeks to train all clinicians and conveners in team decision making. The program further seeks to get youth involved and connected with different groups in the community and to help teens identify a permanent person in their life.

Why do this?

The program seeks to find a permanent, safe, and empowered family member for every youth in its care.

What goal does this program address?

To increase awareness about youth, to involve family and family principals in every stage of the process and finally to ensure that each youth has a lasting connection as well as necessary life skills before being emancipated.

How can you start this program in your county?

This program is dedicated to youth who are currently in residential treatment centers and group home setting. The staff is being trained with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family and the California Permanency for Youth Project. Contact either of these two organizations, or the below-named contact, to obtain further information.

Contacts:

Robert Ketch, Executive Director
626-798-6793
Rketch@5acres.org

Destination Family Youth Permanency Project

What is it?

This program is a collaborative project with county and family alliances, providing temporary homes where youth practice living in a home environment with a family. The family is known as a "bridge" family and is provided with many support services during this trial period.

Why do this?

To allow youth, ages 11 to 18, to experience living within a family and to help them build skills to develop relationships within a family.

What goal does this program address?

This program seeks to ensure that no youth will be emancipated without achieving lifetime permanence.

How can you start this program in your county?

Identify key players for a working group to begin strategizing and developing the necessary resources to begin implementation.

Contacts:

Bob Herne, M.S.W.
Sierra Adoptions
916-368-5114
bherne@sierraadoption.org

EMQ Children & Family Services Wraparound
With Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services

What is it?

EMQ (aka Eastfield Ming Quong) is a provider of children's mental health, wraparound, and social services. It has been nationally recognized for innovation in family-centered, strengths-based programs for youth suffering from a variety of severe issues.

EMQ contracted with Sacramento County to provide wraparound services to CPS, mh, and probation youth in (or at risk of) high-level group care. As a wraparound provider, EMQ is responsible for achieving and supporting youth stability in a permanent family setting.

Why do this?

To support a step-down from group care as soon as the behavior that brought the youth into the group home has been addressed. To train foster families to be successful with high-need youth and to facilitate the relationship between youth and their family connections.

What goal does this program address?

The program was designed to move children from high-level group home placements to family living within a short period. This program was able to step down 30 youth from residential treatment centers during a six-month period: 19 were moved with parents or kin, and 11 went to foster families who support the continuing search for links with relative.

How can you start this program in your county?

More information can be found on this and other model program on the CPYP Web site.

Contacts:

California Permanency for Youth Project
Model Programs for Youth Permanency
www.cpyp.org
510-268-0038

EMQ
www.emq.org

Enhanced Family Participation in Case Planning; Family Group Conferencing; Family Group Decision Making

What is it?

These programs are a family-focused, culturally sensitive approach to developing permanency plans for children who are in foster care or who are at risk of entering such care. The child's immediate and extended family can begin working early with the child welfare workers and others to determine a plan for the safety of the child, for family reunification, or for other permanency options.

Why do this?

Effective family engagement in case planning and decision making helps to restore families, helps to build parents' capacity to raise their children and make sound decisions for their care, and also helps to maintain the family's culture as a source of strength for all its members.

What goal does this program address?

The goals of this program are to keep parents informed of their rights and responsibilities in the case-planning process, collaborate with them in a supportive manner to establish cooperative foundations for future relationships, and fully and actively involve them in the process of assessing family concerns, strengths, solutions, and resources, together with their case worker.

How can you start this program in your county?

Use resource materials from the Permanency and Youth Transition Workgroup. These materials include a step-by-step guide to setting up a program in your county. Other resources are also included in this guide.

Contacts:

National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning
(NRCFCPP)
www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp
212-452-7053

California Permanency for Youth Project
Permanency and Youth Transition Workgroup
www.cpyp.org

Team Decision Making

What is it?

This program is a strength-based "family to family" model that arises from the belief that a child's well-being is best served by an inclusive collaboration of family, community, and child welfare agency rather than by a unilateral public agency decision.

Why do this?

To include the family's perspective and involvement when making removal decisions, changing placement, and in doing permanency planning (including reunification). This program can be used as early as the time of emergency response.

What goal does this program address?

The goals of this program are to reduce the likelihood of out-of-home placements; increase relative placements, to keep siblings together and keep family connected to the community; and to increase family engagement.

How can you start this program in your county?

Use resource materials from the Permanency and Youth Transition Workgroup. These materials include a TDM Desk Guide to set up TDM staff in your county.

Contacts:

Permanency and Youth Transition Workgroup
California Permanency for Youth Project
www.cpyp.org

You Gotta Believe Project

What is it?

This program identifies and finds people who know the youths, provides training for the adults, and certifies the adults' homes.

Why do this?

Once certified under this program, the family does not take the youth unless they understand that they are taking them forever. Even if the youth later does not wish to be adopted, the family is still a permanent connection and relationship for that youth.

What goal does this program address?

The goal of this program is the prevention of homelessness for youth after emancipation from foster care.

How can you start this program in your county?

The executive director of this program, Pat O'Brien, has been conducting workshops and trainings for many different organizations in California. He has also worked with the CPYP and is listed on its Web site as one of its training consultants. His own Web site lists the sites and dates of upcoming trainings.

Contacts:

Pat O'Brien, Director
You Gotta Believe
www.yougottabelieve.org
ygbpat@msn.com
800-601-1779; 718-372-2003

California Permanency for Youth Project
www.cpyp.org

Youth Involvement in Case Planning

What is it?

This program is intended to be used at various stages of the dependency case. It provides an opportunity to meet with the youth and to engage the youth in all aspects of the case plan development or restructuring.

Why do this?

To ensure that the youth is involved in establishing any and all permanency options, in addition to preparing the youth for a self-sufficient adulthood.

What goal does this program address?

Some of the goals of this program are (1) to engage youth in a collaborative and supportive manner from the first contact to establish and maintain a cooperative relationship with his or her case worker and others; And (2) to ensure that the youth is fully and actively involved, at age-appropriate levels, and conversations are held in language understandable to that youth.

How can you start this program in your county?

Use resource materials from the Permanency and Youth Transition Workgroup. These materials include a step-by-step guide to setting up a program in your county.

Contacts:

California Permanency for Youth Project
www.cpyp.org

B. Resources

- Adolescents and Families for Life
  - A Review
  - A Toolkit for Supervisors
- Child Welfare System Improvements, Permanency and Youth Transition Workshop
- Families for Teens: Asking Key Questions
- Family to Family: A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve
- Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth: Introduction and Summary
- The Annie E. Casey Family To Family Initiative
- Tools for Permanency: Family Group Decision Making
- Unconditional Commitment: The Only Love That Matters To Teens

Adolescents and Families for Life: A Review

Adolescents and Families for life: A Toolkit for Supervisors. Robert Lewis and Maureen Heffernan.

By Mary Ford, North American Council on Adoptable Children. *Adoptalk*, Winter 2004 p. 13

Members of the general public and even some child welfare professionals, assume that teens are unadoptable and foster youth would rather not live in families. In *Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors*, authors Robert Lewis and Maureen Heffernan deconstruct the notion that adolescence is a compelling reason to suspend permanency planning, and build a strong case for prioritizing lasting adult connections with youth. The guidebook – grounded in adolescent child development as well as development within the context of abuse, neglect, separation and loss — also teaches workers how to consider and discuss permanency options with teens, and then support links between youth and adult caretakers.

Adolescents and Families for Life is comprised of 27 mini-workshops that supervisors can conduct during staff or unit meetings. Each workshop comes with a CD of PowerPoint slides that can be used via computer projection or converted into overhead transparencies. Mini-workshops include short lectures, discussion, guided imagery, hand-outs and case examples.

The accompanying guidebook is divided into three sections. Themes address the importance of permanency; the impact of the system and barriers to permanence; how to help teens prepare for permanence; finding and making connections with adults; and parenting strategies.

"The objection to permanency planning for adolescents stated by child welfare professionals on every level," Lewis and Herffernan write, "is rooted in the fear of re-traumatizing vulnerable young adults who have been through enough." The first section, entitled "Making the Case for Permanency," accords teen permanence (described as care by kin, guardianship, or adoption) the same importance as routine health check-ups or school attendance -- childhood activities we view as required, not optional.

The cost of impermanence is too high, the authors assert, citing a recent large-scale study of emancipated former foster youth that found fewer than half where employed, many were victims of crime or assault, and 40 percent wished they had been adopted. Social workers are invited to ponder whether long-term foster care connections with a mentoring family, or return to a previously discounted birth family may be considered permanence.

Section two ("Choosing, Using and Developing Tools with Teens") advises

workers to engage teens in permanency discussions by asking how they feel about having a family (versus whether they want to be adopted). The section tackles tough issues such as teen resistance, family group conferencing and birth parent mediation, openness, youth grieving, and helping youth get their emotions under control. In addition, the authors describe in detail how workers can use a child's case record as a road map for unearthing adult connections from the past.

When seeking parents for teens, the authors caution, workers must look for adults who possess unique qualities -- among them, a heightened awareness of youth development, an understanding of the youth's past trauma and past relationships, and an acceptance of the child's approach-avoidance dance as bonds develop between the parent and child. Key factors in predicting a successful placement include the family's level of commitment to a life-long relationship, the youth'' sense of belonging in the family, and the legal and social status offered by the relationship.

Post-placement parenting strategies are featured in section three, where Lewis and Heffernan observe, "the real challenge for [adults who are parenting older adopted or foster children] is how to keep their own issues from becoming confused with the youngster's." One exercise,
"What's the Worst" encourages parents to plan their reactions to negative behaviors. The exercise includes a list of behaviors that the youth may have witnessed and/or in which he may be likely to engage (doing drugs in front of younger kids; engaging in prostitution; stealing food from grocery stores; dropping out of school; etc.). Parents rank the most pernicious behavior as "one" and the least offensive act as "ten." The exercise helps parents to anticipate which behaviors will trigger their strongest responses, and consciously decide how they will cope.

Section three also describes the advantages of forging permanent connections with kin, and highlights adoption issues such as the fragile attachments some teens will form with their new parents. "A critical element in the stability of adolescent adoptions is the parents' ability to make a commitment even in the face of an attachment that is less than that for which they might have hoped," say the authors.

Lewis and Heffernan wisely call for independent living skills preparation and alternative permanency planning to occur simultaneously rather than separately. But to call such work "concurrent planning," as the authors and others do, is confusing. "Dual-track youth planning" may be a better descriptor for helping youth get ready for both family and independent living.

Lewis and Heffernan's philosophy of permanency planning for teens is nicely summer up in the statement, "Teen permanence is a relationship, not a place." These days, as permanence for older foster children assumes a bigger role in child welfare practice as directed by recent federal law, *Adolescent and Families for Life* will doubtless serve as an excellent resource for agencies, social work supervisors, and their staff.

Workshop II C

Permanence and Lifelong Connections for Youth in Foster Care—Implementing Assembly Bill 408 and Other New Approaches

Contents:

Presentation Description:

IIC. ***Permanence and Lifelong Connections for Youth in Foster Care – Implementing Assembly Bill 408 and Other New Approaches***

With the enactment of AB 408 in January of 2004, significant inroads have been made to ensure that no child will remain in, nor emancipate from our foster care system without a lifelong connection to a caring, committed adult. This workshop will explore the issues surrounding the concept of "permanence" and all the challenges that flow with implementing systems change to meet the permanence needs of youth in our care. Focus will also be on practical solutions and ideas for implementing this important legislation aimed at improving permanence for all foster youth.

California Permanency for Youth Project

Director, Pat Reynolds-Harris
Project Consultants, Mardi Louisell and Jim Brown
Program Administrator, Margot Simmons

The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) started January 2003 as a result of a three year grant awarded by the Stuart Foundation.

Project Vision: To achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a caring adult.

Project Objectives:

1. To increase awareness among the child welfare agencies and staff, legislators and judicial officers in the state of the urgent need that older children and youth have for permanency;
2. To influence public policy and administrative practices so that they promote permanency
3. To assist four specific counties and the private agencies with which they work to implement new practices to achieve permanency for older children and youth.

***Project Activities*:**

The Permanency for Youth Task Force The Task Force is a statewide group with broad representation, including public and private organizations, youth and funders, which grew out of the 2002 Convening on Youth Permanency.

Task Force objectives are:

1. To facilitate collaborations between public and private agencies to achieve permanent lifelong connections for youth in the system;
2. To create opportunities for key stakeholders (who affect outcomes for youth in the system) a. to realize the need for permanent lifelong connections for youth and b) to understand that it is possible to achieve these connections;
3. To identify and overcome structural barriers (within the system affecting youth) that prevent achieving permanent lifelong connections; and
4. To promote public relations, education and advocacy efforts that will address the needs of youth for permanent lifelong connections.

In November 2003, CPYP received a grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to pursue the partnership objectives of the Task Force. The grant supports the work of three workgroups addressing issues of partnership between public child welfare agencies and a) the courts, b) group homes and c) adoption/family foster agencies. The groups will make recommendations on how effective partnerships can accomplish improved permanency outcomes for foster youth by November 2005.

Technical Assistance to Counties The project works with four counties, San Mateo, Alameda, Stanislaus, and Monterey, to develop programs to achieve permanency for

more youth. County teams include representatives from the Independent Living Skills Program, Family Reunification, Foster Care, Adoption and private agency partner(s), as well as significant youth involvement. The project a) provides counties with technical assistance over two and a half years as they strengthen their efforts and b) will document significant lessons about implementation useful to the field. Each county has developed a youth permanence plan that includes the following target areas: administrative practices, permanency practice, identification of project target group, staff development, partnerships, and integration with other initiatives.

Training An existing curriculum on Permanency for Youth is being revised for use by California counties and will be made available to all public child welfare agencies in the state in 2005. In conjunction with the California Youth Connection (CYC) and the Bay Area Academy, the project supported the development of "Digital Stories" on permanency by current and former foster youth which are available from CPYP and can be used in training. Two of these Digital Stories can be viewed on the website www.cpyp.org and the full set of 10 are available through the CPYP office at 510-268-0038.

Convenings As a part of the development of CPYP project, a national convening was held in April 2002 to explore the issues of permanency for youth. As a follow-up a second convening was held in April 2003 and a third in April, 2004. An April 2005 convening will also be held. Please see website for summaries of 2002 and 2003 convenings, which contain information on the state of youth permanency nationally.

The project will also hold California convenings to promote partnerships to assist the state in accomplishing permanent lifelong connections for youth in its systems, i.e., group homes, mental health, foster family agencies, adoption agencies and the courts.

Documents To increase awareness of the issue, the project has developed two documents published in April 2004. Both are available on the website www.cpyp.org and through the CPYP office at 510-268-0038.

1. ***Model Program for Youth Permanency***: A report on nine exemplary permanency programs throughout the U.S. and explanation of the critical elements of such programs.
2. ***Youth Perspectives on Permanency:*** An exploration of youths' perspectives on permanency through a focus group process in partnership with the California Youth Connection (CYC).

Evaluation To measure results, CPYP is gathering data over time from workers in each county on the young people being targeted for youth permanency services. In addition, the project is doing a formative evaluation of each county's implementation process that will inform the field of strategies for implementation and change.

Website The project website is www.cpyp.org It includes a program description, staff bios, digital stories, updates on the CPYP counties, convening reports and other interesting information.

Children's Law Center
of Los Angeles

Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Executive Director

PRESERVING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

(Newly enacted Welfare & Institutions Code Sec. 362.05)

Assembly Bill 408, effective January 1, 2004, seeks (in part) to improve all foster children's access to age-appropriate enrichment, extracurricular and social activities.

Ultimate Goal

Ensures that **every foster child's quality of life** not be compromised simply by virtue of their foster case status. Foster children are to have access to, and be able to participate in, age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment and social activities.

The Law

Quality of Life: Establishes the right of all foster children to live as normal a life as possible and participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities (WIC 362.05).

- State and local regulations may not prevent or create barriers to participation in these activities
- Each state and local entity shall ensure that the private agencies providing care to foster children have policies that promote and protect the ability of children to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities
- Caregivers have an obligation to allow children in their care to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment and social activities
- Caregivers are expected to make normal day-to-day parenting decisions and are to act as a prudent parent in determining whether to give permission for a child to participate in any of these activities. In particular, caregivers shall take reasonable steps to determine the appropriateness of the activity in consideration of the child's age, maturity, and developmental level.

Children's Law Center of Los Angeles

Attorneys from the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles were asked to provide specific examples, from their own cases, of the detrimental effects to a foster child's social life when he or she is denied the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and/or socialize with peers. These examples reflect normal childhood activities that these children are being prevented from participating in, simply due to their foster child status.

1) A client was not allowed to attend a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by her father because the other participants had not been "live scanned" (subject to a criminal records check).

2) A 16-year-old living in a group home was told that his 16-year-old friend could not come over to play video games because he had not been live-scanned.

3) A 17-year-old client did not attend her junior prom because her social worker told her that before she could go, her escort had to show proof of insurance. She was too embarrassed to ask him, and missed the prom.

4) An 11-year-old client was not allowed to attend a slumber party because the parents had not been live scanned. The child was too embarrassed to reveal her foster care status and did not attend the party.

5) A 16-year-old client was not allowed to attend a "Battle of the Bands" event at her church because adults would be present who were not live-scanned. The attorney called the church secretary and was assured that the party was for high school students only and that it would be chaperoned by 50 adults. The CSW would still not allow the client to go, so the attorney had to walk the matter on to secure court approval for the youth's attendance at the party.

6) A misinformed CSW cancelled a birthday party for a relative caretaker's biological daughter because the results of all participants'

live scans had not come back yet. The children under dependency jurisdiction felt extremely guilty about ruining their cousin's birthday party.

7) The FFA denied a 17-year-old girl permission to attend a school-sponsored trip to Disneyland. With enough warning, however, permission was eventually granted by the court.

8) A client was ordered to participate in tutoring while in the off-track school break (May and June). Her current certificated classroom teacher offered to provide these services. Tutoring has still not yet commenced because DCFS is requiring the teacher to be live-scanned. School begins shortly, and the child has missed out on an excellent opportunity to get ahead.

9) A client was only permitted to go to and from school. He was not allowed to go outside in the yard to play, not allowed to participate in sports at school, and not allowed to go to friends' homes. When the foster parent's biological children returned from all their activities (friends houses, malls, sports), they controlled what was on TV and what games were played. After the attorney spoke with the foster parents, it was learned that the FFA had rules preventing foster children, based solely on liability concerns, from going anywhere. The attorney eventually obtained a minute order stating that foster parents have the discretion to allow foster children to participate in all reasonable extracurricular activities.

10) A 17 year-old client wanted to go jogging around her neighborhood. The FFA would not authorize it, with no further explanation. The teenager's attorney spoke to the CSW, the FFA, and the foster mother, to no avail. Before the attorney was able to get a court order, the girl was placed with a relative who would allow her to go jogging.

11) Two teenage girls were placed in a foster home through the FFA and were given a list of calls they were allowed to make and receive in a one-week period: 2 calls to or from their mother, 1 call to or from their boyfriend, and 3 calls from siblings. No phone calls to or from

friends were allowed. One of the girls attempted to call a friend but was told to hang up. The friend called back (she had caller ID) and the foster mother told her that the girl was not allowed to talk on the phone. The attorney requested and received a minute order from the court specifying that reasonable phone calls to friends were to be permitted.

12) A 16-year-old, extremely responsible girl, was prohibited from going to the mall or to the movies with friends by her foster mother and FFA worker. No reason was given except that they could not allow it.

13) A 10-year-old client was in an FFA licensed foster home. After school let out for the summer, the foster mother wanted to place the child in softball and karate classes at a local park. The FFA refused permission citing a "blanket policy" against foster children participating in martial arts. The attorney faxed over the WIC code section to the FFA that sets out a foster child's right to participate in extracurricular activities. The FFA changed their position regarding karate classes, but refused to let the minor walk 3 blocks to the park with a very responsible 14-year-old. By the time the issue was brought up in court, signups were closed and the child could not participate in either activity.

Employing a "prudent parent standard" may be defined as: using a rational, informed, and reasonable approach in making decisions to preserve a child's optimal health, well being, and general quality of life. Elements taken into consideration when making such a decision may include, but are not limited to: the child's age and maturity, location of the activity, time of day during which the activity will take place, foster parent or caregiver's personal knowledge of the chaperones or other adult participants, and potential harm that stems from the activity.

Children's Law Center
of Los Angeles

Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Executive Director

PROMOTING PERMANENCE FOR FOSTER YOUTH (AB 408)

Assembly Bill 408, effective January 1, 2004 sets forth (in part) a series of reforms aimed at promoting and ensuring permanence through lifelong connections for all children in foster care.[1]

I. INTENT AND GOALS OF AB 408

- Ensure that all children in foster care **retain and/or establish relationships** with **important individuals** in their lives;
- Promote permanency and stability by ensuring that no child leave the foster system without a **lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult;**
- Implement changes to the Welfare & Institutions Code by imposing **new requirements** on the court, the social workers and attorneys to assure permanence and stability for foster youth; and
- Assure that children 10 years of age or older receive **notice of** and have the **right to attend** their **court proceedings**.

II. REQUIREMENTS

To assure permanence for foster children, AB 408 imposes new requirements on social workers, the Courts and advocates.

A. The Child Welfare Agency/Social Worker

County social workers must not only **identify** "important individuals" for children, but also help **maintain and nurture** these relationships. In particular:

- The social worker shall **ask every child** who is **10 years of age or older** and **placed in a group home** to **identify** any individuals other than the child's siblings who are important to that child.

[1] AB408 also mandates that foster children have access to age and developmentally appropriate extra-curricular, enrichment and social activities. See WIC 362.05. An outline of those provisions is available from Lisa Romero at the Children's Law Center, (323) 980-1599, romerol@clcla.org.

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rev. April 2004

- The social worker **may** ask any child who is **younger than 10 years of age** the same questions as to "important individuals" and provide that information as appropriate.

- The social worker, consistent with the child's best interests, must **make efforts to maintain and nurture those relationships**.

- The social worker must **document** efforts to **search for, identify, maintain, establish, and nurture** a foster child's connections to important individuals.

- The social worker's **report** submitted to court must contain information regarding the **identification** of **important individuals** in the child's life, and an explanation of what **efforts** are being made to maintain these relationships.

B. The Courts

The Court must ensure that social workers are complying with AB408 and that these efforts are documented. In particular:

- The Court must determine if the placing agency (DCFS) has made **reasonable efforts to maintain a child's relationship with individuals important to that child.**

- This requirement applies to children **10 years or older residing in group homes.**

- The "individuals" with whom relationships are to be identified, nurtured, and encouraged includes anyone **other than the child's siblings** and **important to that child**.

    - Caveat: The relationship and ongoing contact must be in the **child's best interest**.

- The Court should verify that these permanence issues are addressed in the **reports** and TILP **case plans** submitted to the court for each review hearing.

- The Court shall make **any orders necessary and appropriate** to enable the child to maintain and to facilitate these relationships with other individuals important to the child.

- The Court has the responsibility to assure that children 10 years of age or older have received **notice** of their court hearings and their **right to be present**. If a child is not present in court, the court **shall inquire** as to whether notice to the child was proper.

C. Advocates

Given the requirements and responsibilities set forth in AB408, it is incumbent upon advocates to assure that:

- The **social worker** makes the appropriate **inquiries;**
- All **court orders** necessary to nurture and maintain the child's relationships are in place; and
- Written **reports** to the Court address these issues.
    - Note: It is equally important to keep in mind that relationships change as children grow and change. It is the social worker's responsibility to **continue to inquire** and ensure that the relationships are appropriate and in place over time.

III. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE LAW

A. Termination Of Parental Rights

AB 408 amends WIC 366.26 to require the **Court** to consider the maintenance of important relationships when parental rights are terminated.

The **county welfare department** shall:

- Ensure that the **child is present** in Court unless the child does not wish to appear or the child's whereabouts are unknown and the CSW has documentation to that effect;
- Submit a **report** verifying that the information, documents, and services that pertain to ongoing relationship with these important individuals have been provided to the child;
- Continue to assist in maintaining the relationships with individuals who are important to the child based on the child's best interests;
- If the Court has identified adoption as the goal and there is no identified or available prospective adoptive parent, during the 180 days that the department is seeking adoptive parents, the CSW, to the extent possible**, shall ask** each child who is 10 years or older to **identify any individuals** who are important to the child and to identify **potential adoptive parents;**
- If a child has not been placed with a prospective adoptive parent at subsequent hearings, the **report must identify** individuals who are important to the child

and actions necessary to maintain the child's relationship with those individuals;

- The agency **shall** make efforts to **identify** any other individuals who are important to the child.

B. Legal Guardianship

If legal guardianship is identified as the permanent plan, all the provisions set forth above as to "Termination of Parental Rights" apply.

C. Termination of Jurisdiction

AB408 amends WIC 391 to require the social worker to report on efforts enabling the child to maintain important relationships when jurisdiction over a case terminates.

D. Emancipating Youth

- AB 408 requires the social worker to **provide information** to a dependent child who has reached the age of majority on maintaining relationships with individuals who are important to the child, and to verify in the **report** submitted to the court that this information has been provided;

- For a child who is 16 years of age or older, when appropriate, the **case plan** (TILP) shall include a written description of the programs and services that will help the child prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living; and

- The **TILP/case plan** shall be developed **with the child** and the **individuals identified as important to the child**, and shall include steps the agency is taking to ensure that the child has a connection to a caring adult.

E. Notice And The Child's Right To Be Present

WIC 349 is amended and requires:

- Notice of **all hearings** be sent to children 10 years of age or older;

- That the notice state, and the child be made aware that he/she is **entitled to be present** in court for the hearing;

- That the child be represented by counsel; and

- **If the child is not present** at the hearing, the court shall determine whether the child was properly notified of his or her right to attend the hearing

F. TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS

AB 408 also requires training for social workers to allow them to implement its mandates and requires specific training on:

- The **importance of maintaining relationships** with individuals who are important to a child in out-of-home placement;
- **Methods** to identify those individuals, consistent with the child's best interests;
- **How to ask** a child about individuals who are important; and
- **Ways to maintain** and **support** those relationships.

San Diego County Office of Education

San Diego County Transfer Release/Checkout Form for Foster Youth Services

Student's Name _____ DOB _____ Grade _____
School District _____ Contact # _____ FAX # _____
School _____ Contact # _____ FAX # _____
Address _____ City _____ Zip _____
Entry Date _____ Exit Date _____ Last date attended _____
Reason for withdrawal: _____ Next school placement _____

GRADES AS OF DATE OF WITHDRAWAL

Subject	Academic Grade	Citizenship	Teacher	Signature	Hours completed	Books/ Materials Turned In (yes or no)

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY TO THE ABOVE STUDENT:

- ☐ Foster Youth Services (FYS)
- ☐ Immunization Records (copy attached)
- ☐ Special Education (IEP attached)
- ☐ SART contract date(s) _____
- ☐ SARB contract date(s) _____
- ☐ Student in homeless situation
- ☐ 504 accommodation plan (attached)
- ☐ Suspension for violent offenses - Ed Code _____
- ☐ Expelled - Ed Code _____

PLEASE HAVE THIS FORM SIGNED BY ALL THE OFFICES LISTED BELOW

Librarian _____ (Amount Due $ _____) Administrator _____
Counselor _____ ASB AP/Dean _____ Nurse _____
Attendance _____ Registrar _____
List other debts and amounts $ _____ Reason: _____
$ _____ Reason: _____

Completed by:

Name _____ Title _____ School _____ Phone _____

Check one: ☐ **Copies of records are attached**
☐ **Records will be forwarded**

Form #_____
White - HHSA Social Worker
Canary - Care Provider
Pink - Foster Youth Services

Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors©

by Robert G. Lewis & Maureen S. Heffernan

Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors© is a unique workbook for child welfare supervisors who need to guide, train and supervise staff to ensure permanence for the adolescents in their case loads. The Toolkit provides practical information, training ideas and exercises to convince workers that teens need, want, and are able to achieve permanent family connections.

This first book in the Toolkit series is organized into three sections: Making the Case for Permanence; Choosing, Using and Developing Tools with Teens; and Supporting Permanence. The Toolkit presents these issues in 27 coordinated but short, teachable units focusing on the following:

- the importance of permanence for adolescents
- how key factors in adolescent development affect permanence work
- helping teens accept permanent family relationships
- identifying barriers within the child welfare system
- building and mending relationships and identifying permanency resources
- supporting the permanent placement
- engaging the teen in child-specific recruitment

The goal of ***Adolescents and Families for Life*** is to teach supervisors how to train staff in this important but difficult area of social work practice. Each unit provides training-friendly material such as overviews of key objectives, suggested group exercises, handouts, training tips, and key-ins to 110 slides provided on the CD included on the back cover.

This Toolkit was developed by Robert G. Lewis and Maureen S. Heffernan in an actual training setting in Colorado. It has been used in over 30 agencies that serve New York City teens, and in 25 states. Robert Lewis provides consulting and training to child welfare organizations with a focus on planning for permanence, policy and practice development. He is a frequent keynote speaker and is author of three books on permanence for adolescents. Maureen Heffernan is a child welfare consultant who specializes in adoption and permanency issues. She is active as a trainer for foster and adoptive parents and child welfare professionals. She is also currently an Adjunct Instructor at Case Western Reserve University where she teaches social policy and community-based practice courses. She is the author of two books on permanency work for adolescents.

This book may be ordered by using the Book Order Form or order through the online catalogue at www.thetoolkit.com.

Families For Teens

ASKING KEY QUESTIONS

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THE PROMISE

To every child who comes into care, society makes a promise to restore him/her to a stronger, healthier, more stable family than the one from which he/she is removed, either by returning the child to his or her family of origin strengthened by the intervention of child welfare, or by helping the child bond to a new family. Children and youth experience this as an urgent need.

When this promise is not fulfilled over time, young people sometimes despair of ever realizing this promise. Their disappointment and anger never exempts the professionals who work with them from fulfilling the promise, no matter how difficult that may seem.

The suggested list of casework practices aimed a securing family connections for young people is not exhaustive, and should be considered as a point of departure in working with young persons who need our assistance in finding a permanent connection to a nurturing, committed adult.

Self Test[1]

1. Do I like adolescents/teens?
2. Do I believe in their ability to (re)connect with a family?
3. Do I believe that they need to be in a family?
4. Do I feel safe, emotionally and physically, around teens?
5. Can I form a caring yet professional relationship with THIS young person?
6. Can I speak honestly, directly and clearly with teens and involve them in all the decision I need to make on their behalf?
7. Can I make a mutual agreement with this young person?

[1] Adapted from "Adoption and Adolescents: A Handbook for Preparing Adolescents for Adoption" by Virginia Sturgeon

8. Can I have a relationship characterized by Honesty, Dependability, Predictability, Consistency and Follow Through?
9. Can I work through/with a 3rd party with whom the young person already has such a relationship?

Reflect on your answers and how they might affect your ability to work with young people. If the answer to any of these questions is an unequivocal "No", work closely with your supervisor on any case involving a teen, or ask to be reassigned.

FINDING CONNECTIONS

1. Have you identified all the resources in the case record? Have you identified anyone who has done anything that could be construed as a parenting act, such as

    - shown up at a meeting
    - called about the youth
    - visited the youth
    - inquired about the youth in any way at any time even once.

2. Have you looked at the case record from beginning to end, including the piece that does not belong at your agency (the Field Office piece, other foster care agencies where the child was previously placed)?

3. No potential permanency resources should be ruled out at this stage, regardless of whether they have been previously deemed "inappropriate". The search process should be inclusive and exhaustive. Don't stop with the first resource or two.

4. Have you asked the caretakers (foster parents, group home staff, child care staff) around this youth, "Who does the youth have connections to?"

    - who does the young person get calls from?
    - who does the young person ask to call?
    - who visits the youth?
    - who does the youth go to?
    - where does the young person go AWOL?
    - If the answer is "friends", are they interested in having friends' parents involved? Have they been involved?

5. Have you talked to the youth about the people in their past whom they remember and with whom they want to be in touch? Have you asked the young person about the people presently in their lives with whom they have connections? Who do they want in their lives when they are adults?

6. Sometimes youth rule out people they want to be with for fear of the circumstances under which they were removed from the home (particularly if they were "thrown out of" a prior foster home). If truth were told, they would like to go back there, but are afraid to identify that home. Ask:

    - "Where did/do you feel most comfortable"?
    - "With whom did/do you feel most comfortable?"
    - "Can you tell me about a time when you felt most comfortable?"
    - "Can you tell me about the places you were where you felt most at home?"
    - "Can you tell me about the people with whom you feel most comfortable?"
    - "Can you tell me whom you trust?"

- If they say, "No one", ask: "Can you tell me with whom you would like to build a trusting relationship?"
- Who do you want to be connected to in the future, next year, in 5 years or more?
- When something great happens to you, who do you feel like calling?
- When something bad happens is there an adult that seems to understand better than other people and won't mess around in your head?
- What it would be like to try to build a family for yourself from your network of caring adults?
- Is there anyone who makes your feel useful?
- Can you think of someone who knows you're not stupid and treats/has treated you that way?
- Who really listens to you and follows through for you?
- Ask questions about connections in the future and look for hints of hopefulness despite the risks.
- Who cared for you when your parents couldn't?
- What adult do you know whose advice your respect (even if you don't feel you can take it right now?
- Who do you want to help you plan for your future?

CONTACT

1. How have you contacted these people (those identified by the youth and by your review of the case record) to see if they are willing to help plan for the child's future? Have you asked these people if they know anyone who had a special relationship with the child in their experience? Ask questions such as:

    - "Can you see yourselves as part of this youth's life?"
    - "What part are you willing to play in this young person's future?"

    - "What are you/others willing or able to do to support a primary relationship with the young person?"

2. Have you encouraged everyone to identify what strong bonds they have with the young person?

PREPARING THE YOUTH TO CONSIDER ADOPTION

1. What have you done to prepare a youth to consider adoption?
    - Has the youth met with other youths who have been successfully adopted and are still in touch with members of their birth family?
    - Have you asked the youth, "Where do you want to belong?" as opposed to "Do you want to be adopted?"
    - Does the youth understand that s/he can be adopted and still be loyal to their birth family?
    - Does the youth understand open adoption and how it would apply in his/her case?
    - Has the youth met (young) adults who were adopted as adolescents?
    - Has the youth had an opportunity to meet prospective adoptive parents who are interesting in adopting an adolescent?

PREPARING THE BIRTH PARENTS TO CONSIDER ADOPTION (DISARMING THE WORD ITSELF)

Although permanency work with birth parents begins before a child comes into care, before adolescence and before the 11th hour

of care, blaming the past doesn't get the job done. Permanence is an ongoing part of a child's developmental needs.

Our job is to convey that urgent need for safety and stability to parents and to help them understand that (1) holding children in unstable circumstances such as foster care is harmful to children's healthy emotional development and (2) adoption no longer means that children (especially adolescents) must be cut off from all contact with members of their birth family.

Here are some issues you might raise with a teen's parent where reunification is not a viable option:

- Talk with the birth parent(s) about how important safe stability is for the healthy emotional development children of all ages, including teens.
  - Use the universal experience of the terrible events of September 11, 2001 to illustrate how difficult it is for all us, and particularly youth in foster care, not to know what the next day will bring or what is going to happen to them next. Help parents to understand that many youth in foster care experience on a daily basis the kind of fear and uncertainty about the future that the rest of us experienced on and after September 11.
  - Tell parents that some people think that children's fears about their future are even more overwhelming because of how little they know about alternatives.
  - Ask them to help you work on this.
- Ask the parent(s) if you can work with them to provide the optimum emotional support, safety and legal security for their children.
  - Ask parents if they know what has happened to other children who have come into care.

  Acknowledge that with their help in identifying and working with a safe and secure family setting, their child will be much better taken care of than children who have no one permanently able to nurture their future and their potential.
  - Ask parents, "If something should happen to you, who would you hope could care for your children?"
  - If a parent is unable to care for a teen because of mental illness or disability, ask, "Who, beside you, do you want to plan for your child's future in order to give your child what he/she needs to develop into a healthy adult?"
- Talk about shared parenting as a general concept. Acknowledge the fact that adoption does not necessarily change their emotional relationship with their children.
  - Remember that this will mostly likely take more than one conversation.
  - Ask parents to identify how families have shared the responsibility of child-rearing in the past.
  - Ask them if they can think of how they did this successfully in the past with their own brothers, sisters, friend.
  - Ask them if they remember adults (other than their parents) who cared for them when they were children. If their parents chose those "helpers", how did that feel?
- Use and demystify the word "adoption". Are you still inadvertently conveying to parents that adoption is a dirty word?
  - Let them know that adoption has changed – especially for teens, adoption is no longer the "replacement model" that it was 40 years ago for infants. Continuing some form of contact with the

birth family is often the norm now in many adoptions, including private infant adoptions.
    - We've learned just how important maintaining family ties can be.
    - We also know just how important it is for a child to feel claimed.
- Talk about openness in adoption so that it doesn't sound like a plea bargain.
    - Explain that we now have ways to reflect that openness in an adoption agreement.
    - We know that secrets whether in a family or across families have negative effects on children and so we want to build openness into families.
- Offer to introduce them to adoptive parents and birth parents who have facilitated post-adoption contacts between birth parents and their children.
    - Give parents a chance to talk with adoptive and other birth parents privately.
- Take the discussion out of the realm of "good parent/bad parent" that is driven by legal necessities, and talk instead about gifts and strengths.
    - Involve parents in a discussion about extending their parenting, not ending it.

PLANNING FOR PERMANENT FUTURE FAMILY CONNECTIONS

1. Is the planning youth-driven?
    - Has the youth identified the people and topics for the planning meeting in advance?
    - Has the youth identified their goals for the future? What do they want to achieve? Where do they want to be in 5 years? Don't rush to discourage their vision.

    - Does the young person understand the critical importance of education, and its connection to permanency?

2. Have you held 3-5 planning meetings with those whom the youth identified (i.e., all the resources with whom they want to have a personal connection into the future)?
    - What have you done to help the teen to prepare for these meetings?
    - What came out of these meetings? Was a primary relationship identified?
    - Have you talked to the contacts about the importance of a permanent family connection, explaining that everyone needs to have someone in their life as family?

BUILDING AND MENDING RELATIONSHIPS

1. Have you prepared the permanency resource(s) for the consequences of getting involved in the youth's life?
    - Have you helped them understand what issues there may be?
    - Have you helped them understand the youth's issues about belonging?
    - Have you facilitated visits with the child?
    - Have you provided the kinds of supports (through counseling and peer support groups) that will be there for this relationship afterwards?
    - Did you phase it all in?
2. Did you help the permanency resource to identify a network of support?
3. Have you connected them with other primary caretakers?

AND KEEP IN MIND . . . . .

In all meetings and contact, maintain a level of genuine respect for the youth and his/her choices regardless of disagreement (disagree without being disagreeable).

Third party reviewers, supervisors and case managers should consistently ask about what kind of permanency casework practice has occurred for the young person.

Remember the 4 domains of success:

- competence (work on deciding to whom one belongs for oneself and finding permanent family connections)
- usefulness (belonging implies reciprocal responsibilities)
- belonging (most securely, legally and socially)
- power (finding, identifying, deciding and acting on belonging to a family)

Family to Family
TOOLS FOR
Rebuilding Foster Care

A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth

BY THE NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL
ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN
FOR THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION
FAMILY TO FAMILY INITIATIVE

A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation
August 2005

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(continued)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many individuals contributed their expertise as this paper was developed. In particular, Sue Badeau, Maris Blechner, Barry Chaffkin, Mardi Louisell, Pat O'Brien, and Kim Stevens gave advice and suggestions and told stories about young people who found families. Mary Stone Smith in Washington State made the eloquent case for youth permanency as a chief way to restore youth mental health.

Many of the quotes in this paper came from the courageous young people who helped make the video entitled ***We Interrupt: Waiting Teens Talk About Recruitment***, Minneapolis, Minnesota, a project of the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network.

This paper was written by Mary Ford, research associate for the North American Council on Adoptable Children, and Mary Boo, NACAC's assistant director, with help from NACAC 's executive director Joe Kroll.

"People say kids my age are hard to place
and that time is running out for me.
Please don't give up on trying.
I'm already having trouble holding on to my hope."

– foster youth waiting for a family

Older foster children and youth have a pressing need for permanency. Almost half of the 538,801 children in out-of-home care at the end of the federal 2000 reporting period were ages 10 to17 (Gibbs et al., 2004). As one youth explained, "Our time is almost up. We want a home, and people we can call parents." Still, tens of thousands of foster youth emancipate from the system without connections each year. This crisis has provoked a groundswell of action by youth advocates, and a call from young people themselves to change the system.

It is not typical for youth to leave foster care and function effectively on their own. Older children need parents and the support of committed adults. Research shows that disadvantaged young people who are connected to adults do better: They relate to others with ease, take fewer risks, have better health, and overcome adversity more easily.

An emerging youth permanency philosophy is driving grassroots child welfare changes around the nation. Given the new focus on older child permanency in federal law,* it is time to stabilize the futures of foster youths and find permanent families and reliable adult connections for them as they leave the system.

A number of proactive public and private agencies have taken the lead to link older foster children and youth with families and caring adults. Other agencies and communities can now put these tested methods into practice and policy across the country to ensure that all young people have secure and stable futures.

At a recent conference a veteran child welfare leader said, "Over the years, when child welfare systems around the country have been given challenges, they've risen to the occasion and delivered" (Maza, 2004). This publication is one effort to help advocates rise to the occasion and successfully deliver older children and youth into permanent, loving families.

The Scope of This Publication

The best way to ensure that older children and youth remain in their community is to avoid placing them away from their homes in the first place. Many states, counties, and cities have made efforts to respond to child protection placement emergencies with alternative resources and have safely reduced the number of children placed away from their homes.

At the same time, thousands of children are already in the system, and advocates and child welfare professionals need strategies to help these children. Therefore, these

*Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 (HR3182) reauthorizes the adoption incentive program introduced in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and focuses the child welfare community's attention on placing for adoption children ages nine and older.

Let youth assume a major role in forming their permanency plan.

recommended actions focus on older children who have been in out-of-home care for two years or more, are considered to be unlikely to be reunified with their birth parents, and have dim chances for joining any family. We chose to highlight strategies and creative approaches that are already working in the existing child welfare system to find families for older children and youth.

In our research for this publication, we identified successful programs, policies, and strategies that have been helping older children find permanent families. We then examined how lessons learned from each effective program or policy change could be distilled into a number of action steps that others might follow. Finally, we created a series of overall recommendations and spelled out how advocates can learn from others to create an integrated system of programs and policies that will help older children and youth find permanent families.

Summary

This tool is organized into four major sections:

- ***Section I*** presents the characteristics of older children and youth in care for two years or more.
- ***Section II*** details the problems that keep older foster children and youth from living permanently with families.
- ***Section III*** describes an emerging youth permanency philosophy.
- ***Section IV*** makes recommendations, describes action steps for change, and suggests concrete ways to achieve permanence for youth in the following areas:
  - Help lawmakers and policymakers understand the importance of permanence for older foster children and youth;
  - Establish agency guidelines to help staff carry out permanency policy for youth, and train staff in the new policy;
  - Help older children and youth consider permanence and adoption;
  - Eliminate reliance on long-term foster care as a case plan;
  - Let youth assume a major role in forming their permanency plan;
  - Use performance-based contracting to achieve timely permanence for youth;
  - Build partnerships between public and private agency adoption workers;
  - Develop accountable youth-centered permanency planning practices and support families and youth after placement;
  - Advocate for federal policy changes to allow for uniform subsidized guardianship policy and funding, and implement state or local subsidized guardianship programs;
  - Use group care less and family-based care more for older children and youth;
  - Recruit permanent families from the child's life and support the new families;
  - Teach families that unconditional commitment is a prerequisite, and teach them to transition gradually to adoption; and
  - Provide ongoing support to the permanent families.

Themes

Five themes appeared in our review of youth permanency efforts and became the basis for our recommendations:

❑ **Every child, including older children, should have a case plan and an action plan for permanence. The action plan should include persuading social workers, youth, and others that permanence provides benefits.**

Prioritizing permanency planning for older foster children and youth begins with accepting that young people need and deserve families. We must commit to cultivating a promise to youth permanency at every level of the child welfare system: among lawmakers, child welfare directors, managers, and workers, and among youth themselves. Effective public and private youth permanency initiatives develop a family-based care ethos and create policies that help staff attain the highest level of legal and emotional permanence possible for young people. Competent agencies work to eliminate the use of long-term foster care and cut back on the use of residential care.

❑ **Kinship families are an under-tapped resource to provide permanence for older children and youth.**

Youth were well served by agencies that used intensive birth family-finding efforts. These agencies, cognizant of the fact that many emancipated youth return home, undertook relative searches and turned up abundant resources, often among paternal relatives. For children who can't go home, momentum is growing for uniform subsidized guardianship policies and programs that help youth live permanently with relatives, foster parents, and other caring adults who receive financial assistance commensurate with adoption assistance. The best kinship programs support families before and after permanency with hard services such as assistance finding adequate housing, plus counseling, advocacy, and peer support.

❑ **Older children and youth should be involved in their own permanency planning decisions.**

Youth must be viewed as central players in their own futures. Programs that include youth in permanency planning are more effective in finding enduring placement alternatives for young people and reap the benefits of their creative and energetic participation.

❑ **Children have a better chance of permanency when they live in families rather than group care facilities.**

Intensive family reunification efforts and post-placement support can stabilize older children and youth leaving long-term group care. Jurisdictions that reduce group care placements and increase family-based placements are becoming successful at achieving higher rates of youth permanency.

❑ **Effective recruitment techniques successfully find families for older foster children and youth, and these new families need support.**

Youth-specific targeted recruitment works well when outreach is culturally sensitive and personalized, when recruiters include young people who have found permanency and their parents, and when recruitment is followed by specialized training and support of prospective permanent parents. When we ask new parents to unconditionally commit to care for youth, we must commit to supporting them.

Every child, including older children, should have a case plan and an action plan for permanence.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

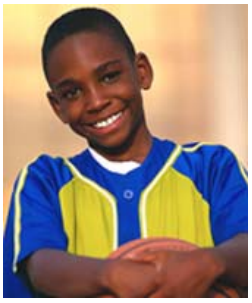
Family to Family Initiative

Our Work

1. Principles	*What We Believe*
2. Outcomes	*Results We Are Seeking*
3. Goals	*What We Intend to Do*
4. Strategies	*How We Achieve Our Goals*

1. Principles and Values

We believe that . . .



- A child's safety is paramount.
- Children belong in families.
- Families need strong communities.
- Public child-welfare systems need partnerships with the community and with other systems to achieve strong outcomes for children. ■

2. Outcomes for Children

We are committed to improving results for children and families in the child welfare system, with an emphasis on safety, stability, permanence, and well-being and includes . . .

- Reducing the number and rate of children placed away from their birth families.
- Among children coming into foster care, increasing the number and rate at which children are placed in their own neighborhoods or communities.
- Reducing the number of children served in institutional and group care and shifting resources from institutional and group care to kinship care, family foster care, and family-centered services.

- Decreasing lengths of stay of children in placement.
- Increasing the number and rate of children reunified with their birth families.
- Decreasing the number and rate of children re-entering placement.
- Reducing the number of placement moves children in care experience.
- Increasing the number and rate of brothers and sisters placed together.
- Reducing any disparities associated with race/ethnicity, gender, or age in each of these outcomes. ■

3. Goals for the Child Welfare System

To achieve these results, we are committed to the following changes in the child welfare system:

- Developing a network of family foster care that is focused on safety, neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in communities in which children currently live.
- Ensuring that all children who come into foster care, including teens and brother-and-sister groups, are routinely placed with families.
- Increasing the number and quality of foster and kinship families to meet projected needs.

- Providing the services birth families and children need in a timely enough manner that they can be safely reunited as soon as possible.
- Screening children being considered for removal from home to determine what help their family needs to keep them safe, to make that help available when it is most needed, and to better support the children who must be placed.

- Involving birth parents, foster parents, and kinship families as team members with our agency and with one another.
- Becoming a neighborhood resource for children and families by investing in the capacity of communities where large numbers of families involved in the child welfare system live. ■

4. Strategies in Our Work

To achieve these changes in the child welfare system, we are committed to implementing four core strategies:

- **Recruiting, Developing, and Supporting Resource Families.** Finding and maintaining foster and kinship families who can support children and families in their own neighborhoods.
- **Building Community Partnerships.** Establishing relationships with a wide range of community organizations in neighborhoods where referral rates to the child welfare system are high and collaborating to create an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system.

- **Making Decisions as a Team.** Involving not just foster parents and caseworkers but also youth, birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the children and for the adults who care for them.
- **Evaluating Results.** Collecting and using hard data about child and family outcomes to find out where we are making progress and to show where we need to change. ■

National Resource Center for
Foster Care & Permanency Planning

Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York

129 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10021 Sarah B. Greenblatt, Director

Tools for Permanency

Tool # 2: Family Group Decision Making

The National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York is committed to the pursuit of excellence in child welfare service delivery. As a Center dedicated to action and change, our work focuses on building the capacity of child welfare agencies to meet the needs of children at risk of removal from their families and those already placed in out-of-home care. Our "Tools for Permanency" aim to promote family-centered and collaborative approaches to achieving safety, timely permanency and the overall well-being of children and families within the child welfare system.

Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is a family focused, culturally sensitive approach to developing permanency plans for children who are in foster care or who are at risk of entering foster care due to parental abuse or neglect. With Family Group Decision Making, the child's immediate and extended family begin work early with child welfare workers and a family group coordinator in developing a plan for the safety of the child, a plan for family reunification, or deciding on another permanency option, such as: relative care, guardianship or adoption. The most commonly used models of Family Group Decision Making are: Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and Family Unity Meetings (FUM). These two models are described briefly below. In both of these models, the basic philosophy and orientation are the same: the immediate and extended family are of primary importance to the child and should be involved in making decisions about the child's well being, living arrangements, and permanency plan. Extended family could include persons who play a crucial role in the child's life, such as godparents.

Family Group Conferencing – Origins in New Zealand

Family Group Conferencing originated in New Zealand and is modeled after Maori tribal practices. A disproportionate number of Maori were in out-of-home placement and New Zealand's European-style child welfare system seemed insensitive to Maori culture. There was a push for a change in practice that would be more in keeping with tribal culture. In 1989, New Zealand enacted the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act which institutionalized the practice of family group conferencing (Hardin, 1996). Now, when there is an allegation of child abuse or neglect, the New Zealand public welfare agency looks to the family first for solutions, and in most cases limits state intervention until the family has had an opportunity to come to its own agreement and plan for how to handle the situation (Wilcox, 1991).

NRCFCPP is funded by the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS.

How Family Group Conferencing works

When there is an allegation of child abuse or neglect, the New Zealand public welfare agency conducts an investigation to determine if the child is "in need of care and protection." If the social worker's investigation determines that the child is in need of care and protection, he or she must contact a person who is known as a "Care and Protection Coordinator." The Care and Protection Coordinator has the responsibility of convening family group conferences. This includes inviting and encouraging the parents, extended family members and close family friends to attend and preparing participants for the conference. If the family is Maori, tribal elders are also invited. In addition to the Coordinator, the social worker who investigated the case will be present. Other professionals who have relevant experience with the children and family may also be present, such as psychologists or teachers. If a court case is under way, an attorney for the child will be invited to the family group conference as well (Hardin, 1996).

There are generally three stages to the Family Group Conference: (1) information giving, (2) private deliberation, and (3) decision making/writing the plan. At the information giving stage, the child welfare and other professionals describe the situation to the family and the family has the opportunity to question the professionals. During the private deliberation stage, the professionals leave the room. The entire extended family that is present meets in private to make a decision as to whether the child has been abused or neglected and, if so, how the child should be protected. This care and protection plan generated by the family might include, for example, a decision that an aunt or other relative will step in and live with the family, or they may decide to move the child to the grandmother's home or to provide day care. This family meeting usually lasts 2-3 hours but may be longer. At the end of the private deliberations, the family presents their decision to the social worker and the Coordinator (Hardin,1996).

After everyone agrees to the plan (which may take some negotiation), the Coordinator writes up the decision and sends it to concerned parties. This agreement will include a plan for future review and possible reconvening of the family. The family group conference can also be reconvened at any time at the request of the Coordinator or any two members of the family group conference if they wish to reconsider or review the plan (Hardin, 1996). Social workers may continue to arrange services for the family, but various members of the extended family usually help with and even provide some of the specialized services (Walker, 1995). Conferences typically begin and end with culturally appropriate rituals. In addition to including tribal or clan elders, other culturally relevant actions are identified during conference planning.

Through these conferences, social workers learn much from the families and move away from a deficit-functioning perspective toward a perspective that emphasizes the families' strengths. Indigenous Maori social work practitioners consider Family Group Conferencing to be the turn around point for the beginning of good social work practice in New Zealand (Walker, 1995). Social workers are also finding that New Zealanders of European origin agree to the benefits of this new system of family involvement in the welfare of children (Hardin, 1996).

Oregon – The Family Unity Meeting

In 1989, almost simultaneously with New Zealand, an American version of Family Group Decision Making was developing in Oregon: the Family Unity Meeting (FUM). While New Zealand's Family Group Conference grew out of indigenous tribal practices, Oregon's FUM evolved from social work practice, family treatment and family preservation models (Keys, 1996).

The cornerstone philosophy of the FUM model is that:

- families, communities and the government must work together to ensure children's safety and well being, and
- extended families need to be regularly involved in making decisions about protecting and ensuring safety for their children (Merkel-Holguin, 1996).

The FUM model places an emphasis on maintaining the child's attachments to the parents and other relatives whenever possible. Family members actively collaborate and plan for the child during the Family Unity Meetings. The resulting involvement of families creates a collaborative rather than adversarial relationship with child welfare practitioners. Oregon has found that families who have made their own plans, are usually willing to carry them out (Keys, 1996).

How the Family Unity Meeting model works

The primary stages of the Family Unity Meeting are:

(1) Initial Referral

The social worker who investigates and assesses a case of child abuse or neglect refers the case to a Coordinator who decides whether to hold a meeting.

(2) Preparation and Planning

This phase can take 2-4 weeks. The worker identifies the extended family and important non-related persons in the child's life. Participants are invited to the meeting and are informed of its purpose and their role in the process.

(3) The Family Unity Model meeting

The meeting typically takes several hours and generally follows this pattern:

- introductions
- goal setting
- strengths assessment
- concerns and problems
- options and family discussion, and
- decisions (during the family discussion and decision stages, the facilitator generally stays in the room).

If the meeting is successful, consensus is reached and a plan of action is created to insure safety of the child / children. The plan is then presented to the court for approval.

(4) Planning and Follow-up

At this phase, the family's decision (or plan) must be implemented. The social worker writes up and distributes the plan. The plan is reviewed by all those who were present at the meeting. Services must be put into place and the plan's implementation must be monitored. Also a follow-up meeting may be scheduled (Merkin-Holguin, 1996).

When this model was developed in 1989, it was only used with families whose children were already in the foster care system. Since 1995, it has been expanded to child protective services and foster care intake (American Humane Association, 1997).

What are the major differences between New Zealand's Family Group Conferencing Model and Oregon's Family Unity Meetings?

Since they developed on different continents, there are bound to be numerous differences in style and practice, even if the basic philosophy remains very similar. However, there are two key differences:

(1) Exclusionary Rule or Veto Power

The FGC model discourages the practice of excluding family members from the conference because it is believed to potentially undermine families' decisions and to violate children's rights to be connected to all family members. The FUM model also strongly discourages the exclusion of family members from the

meeting, however, parents can veto the participation of any family member. Proponents of the FUM model believe that this exclusionary rule provides parents with more control (American Humane Association, 1997).

(2) Private Deliberations Stage

New Zealand's FGC model requires that families must have private deliberations time with no professionals present. Proponents of the FGC model state that families will not reveal secrets with professionals in the room and that professionals tend to dominate discussions. Although facilitators in Oregon have experimented with both private and non-private deliberations time, the FUM model generally encourages professionals to be present during the family discussion. The facilitator's role in a FUM meeting is to guide the family discussion and to provide resource information, if needed. Some Oregon facilitators find this to be a necessary role, and some prefer the private deliberation (American Humane Association, 1997).

Issues to consider before implementing a FGDM Program in your community

Implementing a FGDM program in your community is a very worthwhile project, yet it is multi-faceted and complicated. How your FGDM project is planned, developed, and put into actual practice will have an effect on the project's ultimate outcome. The American Humane Association (1997) has identified 12 factors and categories of issues for communities to consider before implementing a FGDM program model.

These are briefly outlined below:

(1) Principles and Values

Base the FGDM process on an understanding of, and respect for, the community and family culture, and provide an environment for families to focus on their strengths.

(2) Community Profile

Identify and study community characteristics.

(3) Collaboration

Strengthen community collaboration and build on other past or present community movements or initiatives for protecting children.

(4) Funding

Consider implementation costs and identify funding streams.

(5) Legal

Consider the legal framework in place to authorize the implementation of FGDM practices; review the compatibility of FGDM practices with federal child welfare law, federal privacy statutes, child abuse and neglect confidentiality laws; and assess potential agency liability for family decisions.

(6) Political

Consider the viability of FGDM in varying political circles.

(7) Agency Policies and Guidelines

Policies and guidelines should be established on:

- the type(s) of FGDM model(s) to be used,
- how cases should be referred and selected,
- locations of meetings,
- information sharing,

- the use of private family deliberation,
- whether or not the plan can be vetoed and by whom,
- how to monitor the implementation of the plan,
- how to close cases, and
- how to reimburse family costs for the FGDM meeting.

(8) Logistics and Administration

Involve other community leaders in planning, implementation, and evaluation and allocate time for planning, start-up, and coordination activities.

(9) Staffing

Develop written guidelines and explicit roles for all professionals involved in the FGDM process.

(10) Communications

The child welfare system which will be implementing FGDM should be seen as a resource and not an adversary.

(11) Training and Education

Encourage staff to adopt a community and family-strengths perspective; provide training for various professionals; provide an orientation process for families.

(12) Evaluation

Design and conduct research and evaluation on your new FGDM project.

All of these issues do not need to be settled before you begin, but at some point during the planning and implementation of your FGDM project, each point should be carefully looked at and evaluated.

The use of Family Group Decision Making is growing

The use of Family Group Decision Making is growing in the United States as well as in Australia, Canada and England. States such as: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington are experimenting with their own versions of Family Group Decision Making projects. With names as various as: the Illinois Family Conference & Mediation Model and the Michigan Family & Community Compact Program, these models share a family-strengths, culturally sensitive, community-based orientation. The primary goal of these various FGDM models is permanency, stability, long-term safety, and well-being for children within their own families and their own communities (American Humane Association, 1997).

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Please Note: This paper is intended to provide a brief introduction to Family Group Decision Making concepts and models. If you are interested in learning more about FGDM, please follow up with the readings noted in the References and Suggested Readings section of this paper.

Written by: Alice Boles Ott

References and Suggested Readings: Family Group Decision Making

American Humane Association. (1997). *Innovations for children's services for the 21st century: Family group decision making and Patch*. Englewood, CO: American Humane Association.

Hardin, M. (1996*). Family group conferences in child abuse and neglect cases: Learning from the experience of New Zealand.* ABA Center on Children and the Law, with support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation: Washington, D.C.

Keys, T. (1996). Family decision making in Oregon. *Protecting Children*, Vol. 12, No. 3. American Humane Association.

Merkel-Holguin, L. (1996). Putting families back into the child protection partnership: Family Group Decision Making. *Protecting Children*, Vol. 12, No. 3. American Humane Association.

Walker, H. (1995). *Whanau, Family Decision Making: A liberating social work practice based on trust*. A paper presented for the Beyond the Bench VII Conference, Oakland, California.

Wilcox, R., Smith, D., Moore, J. Hewitt, A., Allan, G., Walker, H., Ropata, M., Monu, L., Featherstone, T. (1991). *Family Decision Making-Family Group Conferences: Practitioners' Views*. Lower Hutt, New Zealand: Practitioner's Publishing.

Note: These publications offer a good starting place for studying Family Group Decision Making. These publications are basic yet comprehensive, and should you want to learn more about Family Group Decision Making, these publications provide you with extensive bibliographies and sources for further information.

American Humane Association. (1996). *Protecting Children*, Vol. 12, No. 3. [Available from: American Humane Association, Children's Division, 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, Colorado 80112-5117. Tel. 303-792-9900.]

This issue of the journal, *Protecting Children*, is entirely devoted to Family Group Decision Making. There are articles from social work and legal perspectives, and from American as well as New Zealander's perspectives. There is also a Selected References on FGDM section which is very helpful.

American Humane Association. (1997*). Innovations for children's services for the 21st century: Family Group Decision Making and Patch*. Englewood, CO: American Humane Association. [Available from: American Humane Association, Children's Division, 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, Colorado 80112-5117. Tel. 303-792-9900.]

This is a monograph which provides a comprehensive description of the FGDM model (as well as Patch). It gives philosophical background, the principles of FGDM, how to plan for and implement a FGDM program, references for further study, and numerous program examples in various states.

Hardin, M. (1996). *Family Group Conferences in child abuse and neglect cases: Learning from the experience of New Zealand.* ABA Center on Children and the Law, with support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation: Washington, D.C. [Available from ABA Center on Children and the Law, 740 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005-1009. Tel. (202) 662-1720. Fax (202) 662-1755.]

This book provides a description of how family group conferences are organized in New Zealand, written from the point of view of an American. This book offers a comprehensive introduction to family group conferences, its history and policy development, important practice and legal issues, as well as a comprehensive bibliography and a Where to go for more information section.

Compiled by: Alice Boles Ott

We'd like to help you get started!

Services available from the National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning (NRCFCPP) include:

- Information Services – We can connect you with child welfare agencies around the country that are now considering or implementing innovative program models. Reading materials and bibliographies are also available.
- Training and Technical Assistance – The NRCFCPP can provide consultation and/or training as you consider or plan for a new initiative. We can arrange to meet with you for a brief consultation, we can make an informational presentation at your agency or in your community, or we can work with you to develop a comprehensive in-service training program at the local or state-wide level for casework, supervisory, managerial and/or training staff, as well as attorneys and judges.

If you are interested in working with the NRCFCPP, you can start with a phone call, a brief letter or an e-mail message. Let us know what you're thinking about doing, and we'll work with you to plan the kind of help you'll need to get your project up and running. We can help you figure out how intensive your training program should be, and what costs might be involved for your agency. [Note: The NRCFCPP is funded by DHHS/ACYF/Children's Bureau. If yours is a public child welfare agency, you may be eligible for free training and/or technical assistance approved by your regional office of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families.]

Materials Available from NRCFCPP

Tools for Permanency

- Concurrent Permanency Planning – an approach to permanency planning which works toward reunification while exploring other options for the child, simultaneously rather than sequentially.
- Family Group Decision Making – outlines two models for early inclusion of a child's immediate and extended family in permanency planning decision making.
- Child Welfare Mediation – a newly emerging tool to engage families in decision making in a non-adversarial manner.
- Relative Care Options – explores the challenges involved in foster parenting by members of the child's extended family. (not yet available)

Legislative Summaries

- Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89)
- Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272)
- Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (Public Law 104-193)
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law 104-235)

For more information, contact us at:

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UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT:

The Only Love That Matters To Teens

by Pat O Brien

Having directed both foster care and adoption programs that place teenagers into permanent families, and then having founded an agency that places teenagers into permanent families, I often get asked the question "what kind of people will offer their home permanently to a teenager?" My answer is always the same. I always say "any and all kinds of people who, after a good preparation experience, are willing to unconditionally commit themselves to a child no matter what behavior that child might ultimately exhibit." Teenagers need first and foremost at least one adult who will unconditionally commit to and claim the teen as their own. Any thing less is an artificial relationship. Teenagers need unconditional commitment before anything else constructive can happen.

This country has tens-of-thousands of young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 being discharged to no one but themselves. Half the homeless population is made up of these foster care discharges. This is in spite of the fact that teenagers, as a general rule, are easier to care for and the rewards and gratification for caring for them come back a lot sooner than accepting younger children for permanent placement.

However, our child welfare culture seems to have an anti-permanency bias against caring for teenagers. Very few organizations even have the slightest expectation for the prospective parents who come forward to offer their homes to teens that the commitment they make must necessarily be unconditional for the placement to succeed. Parenting strategies and a whole variety of other skills we teach families in pre-placement preparation and training are essentially rendered useless if unconditional commitment to a child is not imbedded in the philosophy of the preparation and training we offer to these prospective families.

My working definition for "unconditional commitment" is simply that there is nothing a teenager can **do** to stop being someone's child. Unconditional commitment means that we **treat** any child's behavior with the exact same commitment we would treat a biological child's behavior who might commit the very same act. If a bio-child commits a crime in the community, that bio-child might go to jail. But that child does not lose his parents because he makes a mistake. If a bio-child becomes mentally ill that

bio-child might have to be hospitalized on a long-term basis. But that child does not lose his parents because he has an illness that needs to be treated. If a bio-child becomes heavily involved in drugs that bio-child might have to be placed in a residential treatment therapeutic community. But that child does not lose his parents because he has the disease of addiction. But most importantly, if a bio-child has a real nasty attitude a parent develops ways to deal with it. The child does not stop being that parent□s child because of the attitude.

This, of course, is not the case for teens living in traditionally prepared foster homes. Simply put, what all teenagers need is unconditional commitment. They need a place they can make mistakes and not have the equivalent of a child welfare capital punishment sentence imposed on them. So many teens in foster care lose their parents simply because they do what teens do. All parents who come forward to help children they did not give birth to must be prepared in the same permanency philosophy that biological parents automatically imbed in the care-taking of their children.

I have had the privilege to orientate about 2,000 prospective foster and adoptive parents over the past three years. I always ask prospective parents why do they want to be parents to children not born to them. Generally, in a first session orientation all the answers take the form of they either love children and/or they want to help children. My second question to them is □who is coming forward to be a foster or adoptive parent to hurt hurt children?□ Usually one person who wasn□t paying much attention to my question raises his or her hand. All the other participants are usually baffled by the oddity of the question. Then I go up to the person who raised her hand and ask again □you really want to hurt hurt children?□ At which point she immediately withdraws her raised hand. Then I asked six more similar questions to the rest of the group changing just one word. The words I substitute are as follows:

Hurt	Who wants to hurt children?
Abandon	Who wants to abandon children?
Reject	Who wants to reject children?
Traumatize	Who wants to traumatize children?
Victimize	Victimize children?
Abuse	Abuse children?
Neglect	Neglect children?

Invariably no one raises their hand for any of these seven questions. Then I point out to them every time a foster or adoptive parent attempts to return a child for a behavior that they committed we are □re-everythinging□ them. We are re-abusing, re-abandoning, re-hurting, re-traumatizing, re-victimizing, re-rejecting, and re-neglecting

the child.

Every person who comes forward to help a child must come to this work with an unconditionally committed permanency mindset. For example, if they are going to be a foster parent they must commit to the child□s permanency future. The number one permanency plan is for the child to return home. And until that goal is achieved that child needs one placement and one placement only. Anxious children invariably must do things that upset foster and adoptive parents. Can you even begin to imagine what it would have felt like to have someone give you up as a child every time you did something they did not approve of, particularly if your behavior occurred during the most difficult period in your childhood? This happens to teenagers in care every single day as a matter of accepted and common practice. Accepted and common practice that we professionals perpetuate and endorse both implicitly and not so implicitly.

Often a teenager in foster care is in foster care because they have no one planning for their permanency future. They may have a goal of adoption but most often they have a goal of independent living. Both goals mean if the child does not get into a permanent family before discharge from foster care they run a high risk of being alone in the world and becoming homeless after they are discharged from care. Way too many of these youths living in congregate care facilities, particularly group homes, until their discharge from care. They may be taught skills but if no one is found to unconditionally commit to them before their discharge from care their hopes for a brighter future are drastically reduced.

Very often the system takes a half-full approach to teens in foster care and attempt to find *conditionally* thinking traditionally prepared foster parents for them. Intake workers across the land make the same mistake when they called traditionally prepared foster parents for a teen. They make □the deal.□ *Try it and see if it works out.* The implication being that if it does not □work out□ the child will be removed. Can you imagine if you had to love under those conditions when you were a teenager? Can you imagine if you had the equivalent of child welfare capital punishment inflicted on you (i.e. losing the bed you slept in last night) every time you caught an attitude, or every time you came home late, or every time you got caught smoking a cigarette, or every time you broke even the most basic of rules? I knew a teenager kicked out of his home for washing his sneakers in the washing machine. I knew another teen who got kicked out of two houses: one house because he flushed the toilet at night and the other house because he did not flush the toilet at night. The first house the father woke up at 4am and no one dared wake him up with the flush of a toilet. The other house found it very disgusting that this same teen did not flush the toilet. Both houses kicked him out for this utterly minor offense. This happens to teens time and time again because we do not imbed the unconditional commitment permanency philosophy in our preparation of these families.

We have dehumanized teenagers in our care. We have treated them like disposable garbage. And we have to stop it. Kids should not have to grow up in institutions, but they equally cannot grow up in conditional homes. *You Gotta Believe,* the agency that I founded, makes it a practice of teaching each and every one of our

families how important unconditional commitment is. We will only approve prospective families who agree to practice this form of love. Every time we place a child that child is placed forever. We support families through their hard times after kids are placed. And we are there to constantly remind our families that if this child□s adolescence is handed in the right way this child will have a family for life and this family will have this young person in their family forever. And we teach each and every family to treat each child they accept as if this is the child who will bring them their last glass of water. Having practiced for over 15 years in this field, I know of at least three placements where the child that we placed was the child who brought their adoptive parent her last glass of water even over the dying parents□ biological children.

We have to stop accepting that teenagers in particular are not worthy of permanency. We have to continue to recruit only unconditionally committed permanent families for every teen in our care who will be discharged to no one. If we don□t we will continue to perpetuate what we did to another group of human beings in our Country□s history. In an article written in the November 2000 issue of Harper□s Magazine □Making the Case for Racial Reparations□ there was an eerie quote in it about the condition that slaves found themselves in when they were set free:

Think about this.

In 1865 the federal government of this country freed 4 million blacks. Without a dime, with no property, nearly all illiterate, they were let loose upon the land to wander.

Willie E. Gary.

It was so eerie when I read this because here it is 137 years later and we do the exact same thing to tens-of-thousands of predominately African American and Latino children in our Country□s care every year. We discharge them without a dime in their pockets; without any property; rarely with a high school diploma so they mind-as-well be illiterate. And without an unconditionally committed permanent family in their corner they are simply being □let loose upon the land to wander.□ We can absolutely do better for our kids. All we have to do is believe there are enough people willing to offer them unconditional commitment and then go about the good work of bringing those families into the process. It is far easier to find these families than you think. But you can only do so if you first believe it is possible. The choice is yours. Choose to believe. You gotta believe! Our childrens□ future depends on it.

Anyone interested in contact the writer of this article, Pat O Brien, Executive Director, of *You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc.* can e-mail him at ygbpat@msn.com call him at 1-800-601-1779 or write to him at 1220 Neptune Avenue, Suite #166, Coney Island, N.Y. 11224. Pat would be very interested in sharing ideas with you about how you might go about finding homes for any teenager that is in foster care.